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Lisa Stein and Amy Wright

**(Re)-Defining
Scottish
Nationalism
after Devolution**
disClosure interviews
Cairns Craig

(4 April 1998)

Cairns Craig is the Chair of the English Department at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, the general editor of the *Determinations* series on Scottish culture and politics (Edinburgh UP) and general editor of a four-volume series entitled *The History of Scottish Literature* (also Edinburgh UP). He is the author of *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry: Richest to the Richest* (1982), *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and English Culture* (1996) and of many articles on Scottish literature, nationalism, regionalism, and cultural identity. His most recent publication is "I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot and Empiricism's Art of Memory" (*Revue de Morale et de Metaphysique*, forthcoming) and he is currently writing a book on the twentieth-century Scottish novel.

With Scottish devolution having occurred in September of 1997, Dr. Craig's participation in the University of Kentucky Committee for Social Theory Distinguished

Speaker Series on Nation Theory, in Spring 1998, was very timely. In his lecture, Dr. Craig offered a bracing critique of Benedict Anderson's influential study *Imagined Communities*. Using the Scottish case as his point of focus, Dr. Craig argued that Anderson's theory could not be easily applied to Scotland or other emerging nations experiencing similar situations. He argued that Anderson's theory is highly poetic and idealizing, based in part on T.S. Eliot's ideas of nationalism, in which the nation is determined by a unified imagination. For Craig, Anderson fails to consider how conflictual the national imaginary is, out of which the nations emerges.

In this interview, he discusses his analysis of Anderson, and also examines the situation in Scotland before and after the September 1997 referendum and the potential for the "evolution" of literature departments in Scottish universities after devolution.

disClosure: We just wanted to start by asking you a general question about Scottish devolution and what that means and what differences it is going to make.

Cairns Craig: Well, I think that the truth is that we don't know what specific differences it's going to make to various parts of Scottish life—only that it will make an enormous difference to the whole of Scottish life because it is going to generate a new kind of politics and new level of democratic involvement in areas that previously were run by Westminster-appointed bureaucracies. Specific changes are that there are going to be a lot more women in the parliament, there are going to be a range of people who are not professional politicians because they will be selected from a party 'list' on the proportional representation basis. This will change the nature of political debate. Since the powers of the parliament are restricted, cultural and educational issues will be very high on the agenda. At the political level both the fact of the parliament and its representation system will radically change traditional voting patterns within Scotland. Already we are seeing a huge increase in support for nationalists, for instance, when the Labour Party had expected that the creation of the parliament would be sufficient to deflate the nationalistic aspirations for most Scottish people. People are now talking about a possible victory for the Nationalist party in the first elections and about independence within five years. Change on this scale was unimaginable even a year ago.

And whatever kind of politics comes from Devolution, at the cultural level the changes are, already, enormous, simply from the very fact that this vote has happened. There is a sense of confidence in people that hasn't been there previously in their lives. In the university in Edinburgh where I work, for instance, Scottish students used to be

rather retiring and unassertive, and they worried about their cultural inferiority to the English (and the American!) students. Now this has switched around entirely and the tendency is for the English students to feel that they have to try to participate in Scottish life and learn a bit about it and not to come simply as cultural tourists. Scottish students are much more assertive about the value of their own culture—events like *Trainspotting*, both book and film, have helped here—and are confident in using their own voice, using an accented voice which, in the past, they would tend to be embarrassed about. Scottish accents used to have a very 'low' acceptance level in the rest of the UK and people in Scotland would try to lose their accents as they moved up the social scale. Now Scottish accents have a high acceptance level in England, with the result that people in the media and public life actually try to assert their Scottishness through their accents.

dC: This has all happened since September?

CC: No, just not since September, though the confidence factor has increased rapidly since then. There has actually been a steady development over the last ten years or so—a growing sense of confidence and commitment. What happened in September was not so much a new beginning as the culmination of a long process that's been going on in Scotland since the 1960s. I suppose it's the culmination of Scotland's long retreat from the British Empire and the kind of identity that the Empire required, and the opening out of a new kind of identity which is more in tune with a Europe of small nations and regions.

dC: We were also interested in hearing you speak about the period between 1979 and 1997 and what has been going on to rejuvenate the culture of Scotland. We know you started the journal *Cencrastus* and wanted to know more about it and the people who were involved.

CC: After the failure to establish a Scottish parliament in 1979 the sense of depression was enormous: the vote had in fact been a vote in favor but only by a tiny margin, and the lack of commitment among the Scottish people (over 30% didn't vote) made it impossible to feel that there would ever be a resolution of the Scottish situation. It seemed that there would always be a strong grouping in favour of independence but it looked like it would never be strong enough to succeed so that we would have a politics of stalemate. And, of course, it was the failure of the Scottish devolution bill that brought down the Labour government in 1979, because the Scottish Nationalists voted against it, and that let Mrs. Thatcher into power, so that there was a deep divide between Labour and the Scottish Nationalists—a deep bitterness even between those who shared a lot of common ground and that soured the atmosphere in Scotland. As a result, we were looking forward and fearing a

decade of cultural emptiness. A lot of people thought that we were heading into a cultural desert and that what had been happening through the 1970s, with a gradual increase in cultural vitality, would just wither away. But precisely the opposite happened. In fact, what happened in Scotland was very similar to what happened in Ireland in the 1890s after the death of Parnell when suddenly all the political energy that came to a dead halt went into cultural energy. People who were angry or disappointed about the politics went off and got involved in doing cultural things and those cultural events then developed an infrastructure on which the next level of politics could be constructed.

Indeed, a whole lot of new institutions came into existence in Scotland in the aftermath of 1979, and a very symbolic one is the Scottish Poetry Library, which was founded in the early 1980s. Many of us felt that there ought to be a special place for poetry because poetry is, in a sense, the fundamental element of cultural identity, the art through which the language of the culture is shaped. We raised money, and eventually we got an old building in the High Street in Edinburgh, where the Library has operated from since 1984. Recently, however, the Library got funds through the National Lottery (which supports cultural activity) for a new building and chose a site which, as it turns out, is right next door to the site that has been selected for the Scottish Parliament building. So, we're actually going to have the Scottish Poetry Library, which was established to help overcome the failure of 1979, right next door to the Parliament when it opens in 2001, which is a nice symbol of how cultural activity contributes to political progress.

As for *Cencrastus*, it was actually started by a group of postgraduate students in my department after 1979. We were in a pub complaining to each other about how desperate the situation was going to be, and some of these post-graduates suggested that we should actually do something. I had run magazines before and encouraged them in the idea of establishing a magazine that would keep the debate about Scottish independence going. We started with nothing, writing everything ourselves, but after the first couple of issues the magazine quickly established a reputation for doing ground-breaking work on defining the nature—and the problems—of modern Scottish culture. The Scottish Arts Council then came in and supported it and it was able to be produced in a high-quality format, and for 6 years or so it played a very key role in trying to rethink what Scottish culture's relationship with the rest of the world was, and to overcome this deep sense, which you can see very clearly in many of the analysts of Scottish culture right up until recent times, that there really wasn't anything valuable in Scottish culture, that the only way forward for Scotland was somehow to con-

nect with an international culture rather than to develop its own. Almost everything that had been written about Scotland was about its failure as a culture, about the lack of any past values on which the future could be built. What *Cencrastus* did was to adopt the opposite position. It said, we know there has been a valuable and dynamic culture here in the past and that it is simply our ignorance of it, or the biased nature of the ways in which it has been judged, that makes the Scottish past seem like a deformation or a emptiness. I guess we kind of made a bet with our own sense of the value of our traditions and set out to prove that they existed with a richness that hadn't been recognised. We had a very strong agenda on reconstituting a sense of Scottish traditions and of the significance of these traditions. We were looking at Scottish culture, not in comparison with English or French culture, or from the perspectives of cultural theory as developed in England or France, but in terms of the values of the culture itself, in terms that were appropriate to a small and peripheral culture, and looking for comparisons with other cultures of a similar kind. What we wanted to do was to establish how different Scottish cultural value was and to value its differences.

I think for those five or six years *Cencrastus* had a significant impact in forcing many people to revise their conceptions of the Scottish past, and it was out of that work on *Cencrastus* that my *History of Scottish Literature* emerged, which was also designed to underline the richness and continuity of the Scottish literary tradition in defiance of how Scottish writing is usually presented in histories of 'English' literature. A further continuation of the *Cencrastus* project is a series that I run for Edinburgh University Press called *Determinations* which has published about 25 books over the past 7 or 8 years, all of them focused on revitalising our sense of the significance of the Scottish past. The interesting thing is that when you look back over this period you get authors and commentators like Tom Nairn, or Christopher Harvie or Ian Bell, and women writers like Liz Lochhead and Janis Galloway, who were all anti-nationalist or deeply sceptical about the value of an independent Scottish culture in the early 1980s, but who have all moved steadily towards a more nationalist position. Someone like Liz Lockhead says she started off writing as a woman: she thought that being a woman was the important issue and that being Scottish was insignificant to her identity but now she has come to see her role as a *Scottish* woman writer as being the crucial point.

What has happened with the language is perhaps an indicator of the change in people's valuation of the Scottish past. In 1979, the general tendency in Scottish poetry, for instance, was to see the great experiments in writing in Scots that had taken place earlier in the century as

irrelevant. That was all past because it hadn't worked. We weren't going to use Scots anymore. Now, most of the younger poets are quite happy to mix Scots and English and to work back and forward between the two, writing in both, and you get very flourishing writing in Scots-English and in English-Scots. Equally, in the novel, we have moved into a period of enormous productivity and linguistic experiment. In particular, James Kelman's work, which was first published by a small student publishing organization in Edinburgh in 1984, showed how you could fuse vernacular Scots with English. Kelman's novels have been shocking to many because of their destruction of traditional linguistic standards but their style has been taken up by lots of younger Scottish writers, and Kelman clearly showed Irvine Welsh how to capture the voice of the urban under class in *Trainspotting*. Twenty years ago no one would have expected that a novel in Scottish vernacular speech would win the Booker Prize in Britain or would become an international best seller, but both things have happened and that is an indication of just how profound the changes in Scottish culture have been. And it is the changes in the culture, I would argue, that gave Scottish people the sense of confidence in themselves and in their own identity that produced the political changes we are now going through.

dC: So have all classes been involved in this cultural revolution, or has it been primarily an academic or elitist movement?

CC: No, I think this a general cultural change not just involving the intellectual elite. One theory of nationalism is that it is all run by intellectual elites who just use the people as fodder for what they're doing. But if you look at popular culture in Scotland over this period, it has been equally transformed and in very similar ways: it was a parallel development to what was happening in 'high' culture rather than something that was being led by it. In the mid 1980s you started to get Scottish popular music groups—*The Proclaimers* for instance—who sang in Scottish accents. Until then, it didn't matter how Scottish you were, you didn't sing with a Scottish accent. You might sing with a Tennessee accent or an English accent but not a Scottish one. The music might still be a mixture of country 'n' western (though country 'n' western owes a lot to Scottish folk music in any case) and blues but it was *voiced* as being something local, something rooted in a local culture. Equally, there were bands who started doing contemporary-style rock music in Gaelic. *Runrig*, for instance, is a standard guitar and drums rock band but they add a Celtic feel to it with the use of bagpipe-type harmonies, and their music has become immensely popular all over Europe: people sing along in Gaelic even though they may know nothing of the language. Their music has always been very political, and their leader, Donnie Munro, is now standing in the Scottish Parliament.

So, at the popular level as well, you got an upsurge in a nativist sense of cultural identity, the exploiting of Scots and Gaelic, and the reconnecting of apparently international styles with traditional Scottish folk music. So significant has this been, that the unofficial Scottish national anthem is a song called 'Floo'er o Scotland' which was written by the *Corries*, a Scottish folk band. The 'folk revival' that was once a specialist interest of a few enthusiasts has now actually produced a national anthem that is sung by everyone. Equally, Celtic festivals like Beltane have been revived and have become enormous attractions. So that the new energy has gone right through every level of the society and every aspect of cultural life, from TV comedies and thrillers to painting and choral music. What we've seen is a Scotticization even of the most commercial and international aspects of our culture.

To some extent, I suppose, we've been benefiting from a general process of the decentralization of the media. Britain from the 1940s till the 1970s was a formidably centralized state: it was run from London and the limited number of radio stations and television channels were all controlled directly or indirectly by the government, and that produced an incredibly uniform culture. Now changes in technology and the weakening of the control of broadcasting by the nation-state mean that as well as MTV and so on, you get much more local radio, local television, and that gives people a much greater sense of living in a region that's expressing itself, not just a region that's sitting there waiting for someone to tell it what its existence is like. The centralization that was produced in Britain by the Second World War has finally begun to be rolled back and that is giving a new voice not only to old identities like Scotland, but also to the provincial English cities like Manchester, whose cultural life was simply assimilated to a uniform Britishness or Englishness.

dC: We wanted to bring up Benedict Anderson from your lecture yesterday. Could you briefly summarize how you feel Scottish nationalism differs from his main theory?

CC: Well, in relation to Scotland the main problem in Anderson's theory is that he is still using a notion of culture and its relationship to the nation as being founded on homogeneity—in other words, that identity is singularity and unity. In Scotland that model of culture and nation just doesn't work. Now, it may be true that 'nationalism' as traditionally defined has had to invoke a sense of cultural unity in order to mobilize people towards establishing independence, but nations as such do not exist in and through unity—they exist as much through their internal conflicts as by their unified response to external conflicts. To focus on nations and nationalism primarily in terms of 'unity' is to mistake the tactical requirements of a nationalist movement in the stage

of seeking power with the nature of nations and nationalism itself. In Scotland we have diverse cultures, because not only do we have Gaelic and Scots and English speakers, we also have 20% of the population who are the descendants of Irish immigrants, and whose religious affiliations don't fit into the Calvinist traditions of lowland Scotland. Over the past twenty years, there's also been a large immigration to Scotland of English people who have come to take up residence in Scotland because the life is so much better than it is round about London. So, you've got this very mixed and diverse cultural situation, and you have a very mixed and diverse set of cultural traditions and a long involvement in 'international' culture, whether of the Empire or of American-led popular culture. Those traditions sometimes intersect each other and sometimes turn their back on each other, so you can't construct a single and unified narrative of Scottish culture and you can't form a unified identity from them. This used to be regarded as the deep failing of Scottish culture and what made an independent political future impossible. But what we have seen is precisely the formation of a new national consciousness based on the acceptance of diversity rather than integration in unity. Anderson's idea of the 'imagination' is still the romantic notion of the imagination as that which harmonizes and unifies, whereas I would want to argue that the imagination can also be dialogic, a dialectic between traditions rather than a fusion into one unified tradition. Anderson's notion of the imagination in his concept of 'imagined community' goes back to romantic aesthetics and therefore sustains the notion of the 'nation' as it was defined in romantic terms, making the nation like a romantic work of art defined by its unity, harmony, autonomy and so on. I think we need a much more complex model of how a nation imagines itself to match the much more complex nature of the modern nation, both in terms of its relationship to supra-national organizations like the European Union and in terms of its relationship to its component identities, its regions and its inner nationalisms. In a Scottish context, that model of the nation is simply not appropriate, and neither, I think, is it appropriate to most places in the world any more. The 'nation' is both an existing entity and a target that we aim at: as long as we continue to think in terms of unity and harmony the nations we aim at will never be in accord with the nations we actually live in. In Scotland the effort to think through a nationalism without such unity and autonomy is, I think, the most interesting theoretical aspect of the political process we have been involved in.

A second problem with Anderson's model, I think, is its encouragement of the idea that, since the nation is imagined, we can simply reinvent it to suit our own predilections. There is a tendency to see identity as simply a fiction which can be constructed from anything at all. What

this loses is the sense of resistance that is embedded in existing cultural situations. Now it may be that in some parts of the world people can pick and mix their cultural contexts, but they are doing so within well-founded material circumstances which are themselves part of the definition of their culture. But even here there is a context in which, no matter how obliterating modernity can be, certain elements of the past maintain themselves and do not disappear. You're always in a negotiation with those past forms of the culture which go on existing round about you even when you don't know the history that they come from: they are there not just in the landscape and in the names but in the whole texture of the life you're living in, with all its underlying assumptions that define how people relate to each other and to the world around them. Those deeply embedded, and largely unconscious elements, can't simply be erased by imagining a new identity for yourself. In a Scottish context, although we have been reimagining Scotland, we have been reimagining it by engaging and re-engaging with all that has defined why this place is different from other places. Of course, we are foregrounding elements that were previously ignored, but it is not some act of the creative imagination conducted *ex nihilo* where we could imagine simply anything as Scottish, and Scotland as anything we like. It is that aspect of Anderson's theory which, I think, has been used—or perhaps 'abused'—by some recent commentators on national identity.

Something else I feel strongly about and which I didn't actually get into my lecture yesterday, is that Anderson's theory seems to me to put nationalism back where lots of early theorists of nationalism wanted to put it, in the domain of the irrational. It's imagined; therefore, it's not rational. Nowhere does Anderson suggest that reason or rationality is any part of nationalism or nationalist politics. Nationalism is a purely irrational thing. It's imaginary; it's emotive; and it has no explicable or rationally justifiable content. The problem with nationalism from this perspective is that you can never fully understand it except in terms of some kind of pathology. No two nationalists can ever agree about anything because their nationalism is emotive and entirely specific to their individual situations. It seems to me that this is a very dangerous route for us to go down because it actually puts nationalism back into that camp where its ultimate expression is fascism and where fascism is the threat that is contained in all nationalisms. Nation theory has been bedeviled since the Second World War with this assumption—nationalism equals irrationalism equals fascism—and we've spent many years trying to, as it were, recuperate nationalism from the after-effects of fascism. Nationalism has to be analysed from a different angle than this if we are both to understand the nature of the nation and nationalism and if we are not simply to ignore the views of millions of nationalists all

over the world who would assert that they are not simply irrational in their politics.

So, what has been developing in Scotland, and Tom Nairn is probably the principal exponent of this, is what we tend to call civic nationalism, and civic nationalism is, if you like, a reasoned nationalism because it's based on the rationale of the institutional structures of the society. The nation is not founded on ethnicity or on some imagined unity but on the structures of civil life which protect and assert certain values: values which the nation maintains in and through those institutions. The nation is the medium through which values are constructed, asserted and maintained and those values can be reasoned about. In a phrase of Alasdair MacIntyre's, an institution is an 'embodied argument' and a nation is a collectivity of institutions which embody arguments that both debate with each other and which can be debated about in rational ways. The nation exists in order to protect and develop those institutions and their arguments. One is not simply saying "This is my nation right or wrong": one is not irrationally defending something simply because it exists. One is defending a space in which a certain debate about values goes on, values which one is committed to (or committed against) but about which it is possible to reason. Obviously, there is an element of fatality here: one is given one's nation and its institutions have shaped one's existence in ways which may make it impossible to think that any others could be of equal value. But, equally, it is possible to change one's nation—I mean in both senses, to change the nature of one's own nation from within or to change to a different nation. But in either case one is running up against the 'resistance' factor I spoke about before, one is negotiating between a past and future, but negotiating on a reasoned and not simply on an irrational basis.

The role of the nation in the contemporary global economy is, I think, both an explicable and a rational one. The nation offers a counterbalance to international capitalism. When you have capitalism ready to shift resources around the world and imposing homogeneity on life, you need power in small, local communities to protect those aspects of life, those aspects of identity without which we would lose our sense of humanity. The rise of nationalisms all over the world are a part of the resistance that people are making which they can't make by actually changing the economics of capitalism and how it works, but they can make by using those spaces that are left to them for developing their own cultural agenda and not just being imposed on them from the outside.

dC: We are interested, being that we're all English majors, how your position as a Scottish person and the chair of a Department of English with many English professors and students has affected your personal

sense of identity, and how you see this now (after the referendum for devolution) affecting the teaching of Scottish literature at your university.

CC: Well, let me give you a little bit of history on that. In the 1960s and early 1970s in Edinburgh University, we had one course on Scottish Literature which was an introductory first year course. That was all the Scottish literature you could really do unless you happened to have a tutor that was prepared to let you do some as you went along, but it wasn't built into the courses and wasn't given a very public profile. The situation wasn't much better in any Scottish University: Scottish literature was not taught, or taught to only a small handful of students, often from abroad, because if you were studying 'Literature' then you would study English literature. When we tried to introduce changes into this, we got an enormous amount of resistance because it was seen to be a challenge to the inclusive nature of English studies. To many colleagues 'English' covered anything written in the language, and not, as I believed it to be at Edinburgh, the promulgation of English national values. To set up courses in Scottish Literature was to 'nationalize' the existing 'English Literature' structure and thereby problematize the whole discipline. How central, for instance, are Chaucer and Shakespeare and Milton if 'English' English Literature is no longer absolutely central to your sense of studying literature in English? Our institutional answer to this has been to make Scottish Literature and English Literature absolutely equal in status, allowing students to combine English literature courses, Scottish literature courses, or to specialize in either. The problem of how you define English Literature—and, indeed, Scottish Literature—then becomes one of the key theoretical issues which runs through all of our introductory courses.

The interesting thing that has happened is that the members of staff who would have opposed this, indeed, *did* oppose it in the 1970s, mostly now also teach Scottish Literature as well as English Literature courses, or have included Scottish works on their English courses. In part, this is because many English people in Scotland have come to be defenders of the very different kind of university system that we have in Scotland, which is more like the American system, rather than the highly specialized English system. In defending the institution with its four-year rather than three-year degree structure, they have come to appreciate the values of the culture they are in. Gradually, many of my colleagues who were specialists in English Literature, or indeed in American Literature (because we taught American literature before we taught Scottish literature!) have developed Scottish interests and now publish on Scottish literature as well. It is generally accepted now that anyone teaching literature at a Scottish university should have an inter-

est in and an awareness of Scottish Literature and that no student should be able to do English Literature without encountering Scottish works. Nonetheless, I don't think we've fully resolved the tension between English Literature as a kind of continuous cultural "bridge-head" to keep us in touch with the heartland of culture, and English Literature as a much broader, more inclusive discipline. Certainly, in my department, we're moving to a model of English studies where 'English' English literature is just one of many literatures in a post-colonial environment. It's not that we see Scottish Literature as specifically 'post-colonial' because the term is simply inappropriate to a country that was so heavily involved in colonization, but we're interested in the ways that the same issues come up in post-colonial literatures that Scottish literature has gone through - how as you use dialects and how you relate those to standard forms of speech, for instance. Scottish writing has a long experience of some of the issues that other cultures are encountering as novelties and we are interested in setting Scottish culture in a context with many other cultures with parallel challenges rather than constantly relating ourselves to English—or American—culture.

In terms of my own particular position, I did my Ph.D. on Yeats and Eliot because I couldn't do it on any of the Scottish writers I was interested in. I wanted to stay in Scotland and that was a difficult struggle since there were few jobs and there was a tendency to appoint people from Oxford and Cambridge on the basis that they must be better at English Literature. When I was fortunate enough to get a job in Scotland, and was established with tenure, then I devoted, I suppose, about ten years to re-educating myself in Scottish culture. Although I had read the major figures like Burns, I had no real sense of what the past of Scottish culture was about, never having had the opportunity to study it. So, I suppose for people of my generation you had to take a whole slice out of your life just to re-educate yourself into the culture that you had had 18 years of being educated out of, and you end up with an odd academic career because effectively you're running two parallel careers. I mean, I'm still writing on Yeats and Eliot and Pound, and I'm also writing on lots of Scottish material. But to understand the Scottish material and what has gone wrong with our understanding of Scottish culture, you have to get into nation theory as well, and become at least an amateur theoretician or political scientist. That can create tensions in an academic environment where you are supposed to be a literature specialist, but I suppose the exciting thing about Scottish studies is that it is a focus for a lot of interdisciplinary work, and many of us have found this liberating after being trapped in traditional English departments. It is liberating to be developing your ideas in a context where the work of political scientists and sociologists and art historians can

impact on your own work and where your own work can also have direct consequences in other disciplines—or, indeed, in politics. I think that direct sense of cultural engagement is something that can still exist in small cultures but which has been pretty much lost in the relationship of literature to cultural life in larger countries.

Within the educational system, I think all universities in Scotland are now re-orienting themselves towards Scottish culture in an effort to deal with the Scottish Parliament, which will control their funding. They cannot be seen any longer as being, as it were, barriers to the development of Scottish culture, standing outside of it and having nothing to do with it. They have to recognise a Scottish culture and try to shape it through their own activities. This ought to mean we are looking at a very productive period for Scottish culture—at least at an academic level. The big worry, of course, is that once the Parliament is there all of the cultural energy will go back into politics and the huge upsurge in the creative arts that we have seen over the past twenty years will collapse back. But I think if you live in a small culture you've got to expect that you cannot have continuously sustained levels of major achievement by your writers and artists. You're going to get peaks, and you're going to get long periods of lesser achievement. You've just got to accept that as the nature of small cultures, and there's no point in berating yourself that your culture is failing to live up to what it ought to be, it's bound to have these periods where it's not able to produce major cultural contributions and you cannot judge it by the standards and expectations that people might have of the world's major cultures. But if you keep open the lines of communication between the present and past then there will always be the possibility of another significant development that contributes not just to your own culture but to the cultures of other peoples as well.

dC: English literature used to be viewed as a unified literature, but it is now divided into regional and ethnic varieties. Is a similar situation present in Scottish literature as in the divisions between lowland and highland? Is there that kind of diversity in Scottish literature?

CC: Certainly, it is possible to see different traditions in highland and lowland writing, but then there are also places such as the Orkney islands where a writer like George Mackay Brown developed a very specific sense of tradition, and within the lowlands there is a big gulf between the Glasgow writers and Edinburgh writers. But I don't think it will be the same in Scotland as it is here in the USA. Obviously, the way people here have responded to globalized and homogeneous culture is to go back to ethnicity - to much more ethnic ways of identifying yourself. But in Scotland precisely because there hasn't been a Parlia-

ment for 300 years and there has been no center to Scottish culture, Scottish culture has always been very regional. We've had enormous diversity in regional traditions in writing, but we are, after all, a very small country and these regions may be very different but they are not far from each other. Everything is happening within a fairly tight boundary where it's still possible for people to talk to each other across those boundaries: indeed, I think more and more Scottish writers tend to want to operate between these various categories rather than from within any one of them. There is a long tradition in Scotland of novels, in particular, based on double narratives or on characters who are or have doubles—Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, which appeared just after the 1979 Referendum and was in some ways an effort to explain Scotland's failed politics, is the most famous modern version, or Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*—and you could see this as the effect of living in a country with mixed traditions—highland, lowland, Gaelic, Scots—but where the traditions constantly impinge and abut on each other.

One of the problems in English studies, clearly, is that this diversification into regional and ethnic literatures means we have fewer and fewer texts in common to talk to each other about—this is why 'theory' has become so important, of course—it is the common language of our diversities. But, I don't think that is going to happen in Scotland so much because the literature just doesn't have the scale to develop that level of specialization. One of the things we are trying to do, however, is to open new ways of comparing Scottish writing with our nearest neighbours, with Irish and Welsh writing, because these cultures have been virtually closed off from each other for a very long time. Each has sought to identify itself over against English culture but rarely shown any awareness of their common situation or, indeed, of their specific differences. Various initiatives are going on to try to develop links between Scottish and Irish studies, links which have a political dimension as well because Ulster, of course, is the point where Scottish and Irish cultures overlap. The achievement of devolution in Scotland is perhaps going to have significant consequences for how we perceive the Ulster situation, because if Scotland is headed towards independence, then what does it mean to be British in Ulster if you're actually of Scottish descent? Who are you identifying with? So, it complicates the whole ideological stance of people of Scottish descent in Ulster and may in fact provide one of the ways in which that situation can be resolved.

dC: From a chapter of *Out of History*, you describe literary references of nation inscribed through landscape. Have you seen instances of this occurring in Scottish literature as well as English?

CC: Scottish landscape was so pictorialized by romanticism that landscape is crucial to Scottish culture—but crucial because it is a problem all Scottish artists have to come to terms with. The landscape has been constructed in certain specific ways that it is sometimes difficult to encounter it except as something that's already been turned into art. And often it is treated as 'natural' when in fact its 'wildness' is the product of historical changes, historical changes that were designed to get the people off the land so that it could be more effectively exploited. One of the things Scottish writers have tried to do, I think, is to re-establish a connection with landscape which gets behind all that romantic glamour; to see the land not as something in itself but in terms of its human significances. The work of people like Neil Gunn and Lewis Grassie Gibbon was crucial to this in the 1920s and 30s.

But the real significance of the Scottish landscape (and what has driven much of Scottish culture from the 18th century until today) is the fact that you have juxtaposed with each other this intense industrial culture in the Scottish lowlands and this apparently 'primitive', 'wild' countryside only a few miles away. You can be standing in Glasgow, in the heartland of the industrial revolution, and 20 miles away you have the romantic picturesqueness of Loch Lomond. They are about as close as you can get to each other geographically and yet they seem world's apart. So, landscape in Scottish writing tends to be used in terms of a juxtaposition between a wild environment and an industrial world and what the meaning of those two worlds are to each other. It's almost as though the Scottish highlands get used as an emblem of an alternative set of moral, ethical, and philosophical possibilities to the world of the industrial city, and characters are often described making journeys between the two, and trying to relate the life of this industrial city, a life in the midst of an intense historical process, with this other world which seems historyless, which seems to defy the processes of history.

Also, the Scottish landscape quite literally is one of the oldest landscapes in the world and it was in the exploration of this landscape in the eighteenth century that modern evolutionary geology developed—particularly in James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth* which was published in 1797. The Scottish Highlands therefore also represent something primordial and unchanging, something inhuman. It is a landscape which, however picturesque it may appear, is also fearsome: it is like the physical embodiment of a Calvinist God. While landscape in English culture has been presented as a human environment, the environment you go back to to find your humanity. In Scotland it's the opposite: the landscape is sublime, menacing, a challenge to your humanity. It tells you how insignificant your achievements may be in relation to the permanence of this landscape. It doesn't offer the consolation of being at

one with nature but rather insists how unapproachable the natural is. The great statement of this is Hugh MacDiarmid's poem "On a Raised Beach" where he describes a beach of rocks, and suggests how impossible it is for human consciousness to relate to the rocks and to the whole process of evolution which they represent: there can be no mystical union between mind and matter such as the romantics might have envisaged. The rocks are there from the beginning and they remain alien. He says, "There are plenty of ruined buildings in the world but no ruined stones./No visitor comes from the stars/But is the same as they are." The landscape is a kind of denial of human history and of its significance. What you'll find in a Scottish novel is that the characters at the end of the novel go back to that landscape, not for consolation but to confront the ultimate insignificance of human history in relation to it.

dC: Do you think that Hugh MacDiarmid's "A Drunk Man Looks at a Thistle" demonstrates the kind of emerging consciousness that modernists such as Woolf and Joyce do in their works completed in the mid 1920s?

CC: MacDiarmid was very conscious of Pound and Eliot and what was going on in modernism in London in the aftermath of the First World War. He was also very conscious of Joyce and had encountered Joyce's work in its serial publication before *Ulysses* appeared in 1922. There is no doubt that MacDiarmid saw himself as a modernist writer. But what happened to him, which was kind of a distinctively Scottish thing to have happened, was that as he was struggling to write new modern works in the years after the first world war, he encountered almost by accident a book on Scottish dialects. The words in it just leapt out at him and he made a poem out of it: 'Ae weet forenicht i' the you-trummle/I saw yon antrin thing,/A watergaw wi' its chitterin' licht/Ayont the on-ding' ['One wet evening at the time when the sheep have been sheared and tremble in the cold/I saw that strange thing/ a rainbow with its shivering light/ beyond the on-coming storm'] You can see how compressed the Scots is compared to English and that was one of the things MacDiarmid liked! But this was, if you like, a sort of 'found' poem, because all the words were there in the book he was reading, and he just formed them into poems. And what he produced was so alien to what he had been trying to do as a poet that he actually had to give himself another name to attach to his writings in Scots (his real name was Christopher Murray Grieve). So in a way, it's almost as if in MacDiarmid's work there's a sort of crossing point between modernism and the recovery of a traditional Scottish voice. Also, there is in these early poems of MacDiarmid's the sense of a recovery of the poet as representative of the folk, which is very much what Burns was trying to do. So what you get is a kind of folk modernism which is very differ-

ent from what Eliot and Pound were doing, and more, to some extent, like what Yeats was doing in trying to fuse Irish mythology and modernist technique or what William Carlos Williams was trying to do to capture an American voice. It is something different from the cosmopolitan definition of modernism that we usually work with in the anglophone world, something perhaps we need to explore and understand as a different dimension of modernism, a sort of nativist modernism. So, when he was writing "A Drunk Man Looks at a Thistle," MacDiarmid was trying to contribute an equivalent Scottish modernist epic to rival the "The Wasteland" or *Ulysses*. The poem is riddled with references to Eliot and to Joyce, but the substructure, of course, is from Burns's "Tam O'Shanter." It's the drunk man trying to get home just as Tam is trying to get home. It was consciously an effort at modernist novelty and it was an effort to use the aesthetics of modernism, of conjunction and disjunction, while at the same time relocating himself within a distinctively Scottish tradition.

But I think in some ways MacDiarmid as modernist was driven in directions which were actually in conflict with his interest in and commitment to Scottish culture. So you get a crossing point here where he's writing Scots, he's writing out of Scots tradition in modernist fashion, but within ten years he's started writing in English a style that he regards as a kind of "world" English that is dissociated from the English tradition. Except in the early poems of the mid 1920's, he didn't really find a successful way of fusing those two dimensions together. In some of the later poems, he also used Gaelic, as well, but I suppose the thing that we've come to realize about MacDiarmid was that his experiments in Scots were much like the experiments that he was later going to make in English, because all of his poems are stitched together from other people's texts. Basically, he steals words, phrases, paragraphs from other people and stitches them together: he is the ultimate version of the poet as collage-maker. It has taken us a long time to learn to read the later poems, but as you learn to read them, what you realize is that they are actually doing the same thing as the poems in Scots, except that in the Scots poems he's using a dictionary of the older Scottish tongue as the basis for the collage, whereas in the English poems he's using scientific and philosophical texts and passages from the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Whether MacDiarmid's later poetry is a fulfilment of his modernist intent or a betrayal of his Scottish commitments is a matter of much debate, and so are the consequences of his influence. Partly because MacDiarmid's early work is so powerful and his views on Scotland so abrasive, in a way he may have hindered the development of certain aspects of Scottish writing. His use of Scots encouraged some Scottish

poets to see themselves as having to write in Scots as a kind of national revival language, rather than in a language in which Scots was part of the texture of what you were doing in English, or where you worked back and forward between the two. There was a tendency for people who followed MacDiarmid's achievement to try to purify Scots and to set it up as an alternative to English . . . For instance, there's a superb joke in one of Tom Leonard's books where he's got a poster for a Makkar's (i.e. a poet's) meeting and it says "Meetin' tonight to decide the spellin' o' this poster." There was tendency for poets writing in Scots to create a kind of ghetto of purified language that refused to acknowledge the complexities of the real linguistic situation in Scotland. They tried to recreate a standard Scots to replace standard English and that became an obstruction to a really creative use of the language. There were very good poets who worked in Scots in the MacDiarmid tradition, but I think there were also others who got locked in and trapped by this.

So, although MacDiarmid was a very significant force in the development of a sense of an independent Scottish culture I guess that I personally have spent a lot of the last ten years trying to demolish MacDiarmid's influence because there was a generation of people in Scotland who thought that MacDiarmid *was* Scottish culture and that anything MacDiarmid said about it must be true. But I think we have to recognise that in certain ways MacDiarmid was a very destructive influence because he wanted Scottishness to be identical with himself and was dismissive of anyone who failed to come up to his sense of what Scottishness entailed. It has taken quite a while for some people to escape from that version of the culture, a version that excluded lots of people—not least because it is a deeply male, deeply authoritarian conception of cultural authority. It is almost a kind of Calvinism relocated into culture. I think one of the most useful things we've done over the past twenty years is to revitalize our sense of Scottish culture in the 1920's and 30's, displacing MacDiarmid and rediscovering the works of a wider range of writers, particularly of women writers, who have a far less abrasive sense of what Scottish culture can and ought to be.

There is, for instance, a woman called Nan Shepherd, whose novels—*The Quarry Wood*, *The Weatherhouse*—have been republished over the past ten years. Her writing is in English but it integrates a lots of Scots into it and it predates many of the experiments with writing in Scots of the more famous male writers. Now, Nan Sheppard was in communication with MacDiarmid and with Neil Gunn and clearly influenced the work of Lewis Grassie Gibbon (whose *A Scots Quair* is probably the most famous twentieth-century Scottish novel), but by the 1970s she had been so completely forgotten that even though she had been the

editor of the *Aberdeen University Journal* she was unknown to the English Literature department in Aberdeen when I worked there. A series called Cannongate Classics, of which I am one of the editors, has just reissued the complete works of Nan Shepherd in a one-volume edition. We've also issued the novels of Willa Muir, who was the wife of Edwin Muir, the poet and translator of Kafka, in a big one-volume edition. I think one of the most useful things we've been able to do in terms of understanding Scottish culture is to open out this period of the 1920's which was so influential in Scottish writing, open it out to see a much more complex cultural picture than the one which was defined by three or four major, male writers. What we've been establishing is the fact that far from consisting of just a few major figures, there was a complex and vibrant Scottish culture, linked with modernism, but a modernism with a much more European focus than the Eliot-Pound definition of modernism, and involved in experiments with artistic form which were deeply related to the whole tradition of Scottish writing and, in particular, to its folk dimension. So Nan Shepherd, for instance, is experimenting not with stream of consciousness, like Virginia Woolf, say, but with narratives that displace the protagonist in favour of a community-based conception of the novel, one in which a folk voice will challenge the centrality of the narrator figure. Shepherd is interested in how the folk can be given a voice in the novel, whose form is fundamentally bourgeois in its assumptions and expectations. This is where modernism and Scottish tradition intersect to produce a very distinctive literary style, one which involved a lot more writers than just MacDiarmid. In that period there was a very distinctive range of experiments, whose recovery has gone along with—and perhaps contributed to—the revitalization of contemporary Scottish writing.

What we can now see is a continuity between the work of the writers in the 1920s and the writers of the 1980s and 90s, a continuity which comes out of the specific nature of Scottish culture and the problems that it poses for the writers. Handling dialect is one of these, because 'dialect' is not a 'low' language in Scotland, it is the form of the country's major literary tradition going back to the middle ages: so writers have to find ways to relate English, as the language of educated speech, to Scots, as the language of the folk of the Scottish literary tradition. In discovering ways of handling this conflict Scottish writers have developed narrative techniques which are a distinctive product of their own culture but clearly have application elsewhere. Having this tension between the two languages also creates conflicting poles of value, and leads to the narrative of 'doubles' and of split personalities so pervasive in the Scottish tradition. One of the reasons that I distrust Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' is perhaps because I

wouldn't want to see Scotland lose that sense of dialogue and dialectic, that sense of inner conflict, that used to be regarded as the great weakness of Scottish culture, but which we can now see, I think, to be its distinctive strength.